

Oklahoma Higher Ed Chancellor Discusses Tuition Freeze Proposal

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Chancellor Glen Johnson

State Regent Jimmy Harrel

Determined to keep higher education within reach of Oklahoma's working families, Oklahoma higher education Chancellor Glen D. Johnson explained the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education's FY 2010 legislative budget request – that would provide for a freeze of tuition and mandatory fees – at a November 10 luncheon held on the campus of Southwestern Oklahoma State University in Weatherford.

The "Putting Families First" initiative requests \$80.4 million in new state appropriations for operational needs of the institutions so that tuition and mandatory fees can be frozen at the current level for the 2009-10 academic year.

Johnson, State Regent Jimmy Harrel and institution presidents Dr. John Hays of SWOSU, Dr. Janet Cunningham of Northwestern Oklahoma State University, Dr. Larry Devane of Redlands Community College and Dr. John Feaver of the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma informed legislators and area residents of the initiative during the first stop on Johnson's legislative tour across the state.

The funds would cover increases in operational fixed costs and other institutional priorities at Oklahoma's public colleges and universities and allow them to continue to provide quality instruction, vital student services and a sufficient number of sections and course offerings to shorten the time needed to complete a degree.

"Our system has done a good job of keeping the cost of education as low as possible, but it is becoming very clear that our state will need to increase its investment in higher education in order to keep higher education within reach of Oklahoma's working families," said Chancellor Glen D. Johnson. "Our 'Putting Families First' initiative provides our institutions the funding they need to operate and provides students and their families with significant financial relief to allow them to focus on their education."

Johnson also announced the remainder of the State Regents' FY 2010 legislative agenda.

The State Regents are asking for \$4.9 million from the Legislature to annualize the debt service for the \$100 million bond authorized during the 2008 legislative session for the state's match to the endowed chairs program.

Student aid funding will also be a focus for the State Regents in the upcoming legislative session because more financial assistance reduces barriers that prevent students from attending college. The Academic Scholars Program for high-performing students is requesting an additional \$400,000 next year.

The State Regents will also seek \$50,000 to fully fund the Regional University Baccalaureate Scholarship program. Expenditures for the past two years have

exceeded the \$800,000 appropriation the program receives. Carryover funds have been used to fund the excess, but those funds will be depleted by the end of FY 2009.

The State Regents also seek to increase funding for the concurrent enrollment program, which allows high school juniors and seniors to take credit-earning college courses. The State Regents propose to increase funding for the program by \$625,000. Additionally, the State Regents are requesting an additional \$100,000 for cooperative alliance fee waivers. The Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education has agreed to fund \$50,000 annually for waivers. In the past, the State Regents' portion of the waivers has been paid from one-time carryover funds from other waiver programs that are now depleted and no longer available for future waivers.

The State Regents will seek \$200,000 for the state's ReachHigher program. The funds will be used to enhance ReachHigher scholarships and tuition waivers. In order for the program to be even more successful, an increase in financial aid to adult students is needed.

The final component of the legislative agenda is a request for nearly \$200,000 for the Office of Accountability. The office administers two state programs: the Oklahoma Educational Indicators Program and the Oklahoma School Performance Review Program.

The total request for new FY 2010 funds is \$86,874,880.

This is the second year Johnson has embarked on a statewide tour promoting the State Regents' legislative agenda.